

Message Text

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ACTION NODS-00

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC NIACT IMMEDIATE 2966

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 LONDON 06593

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E.O. 11652: XGDS-1
TAGS: PFOR, RH, UK, US
SUBJECT: RHODESIA: MEETING WITH FOREIGN SECRETARY
OWEN

SUMMARY: IN HOUR-LONG DISCUSSION WITH OWEN, FOUR MAJOR
POINTS AROSE: 1) WHILE HMG WOULD LIKE TO MAINTAIN THE
MOMENTUM OF THE RHODESIAN INITIATIVE, IT IS PREPARED TO
DELAY AN ANNOUNCEMENT OF A CONFERENCE; OWEN WOULD
NEVERTHELESS LIKE TO MAKE AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON "JOINT"
BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS NEXT THURSDAY IF
THIS APPROACH CAN BE AGREED IN LONDON NEXT WEEK; 2)
WHATEVER ANNOUNCEMENT EVENTUALLY EMERGES MUST CLOSELY
ASSOCIATE THE UNITED STATES WITH THE EFFORT; OWEN IS
CONCERNED LEST THE UNITED STATES APPEAR TO BE BACKING
OFF; 3) OWEN FAVORS A VICE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT TO AFRICA
BUT SUGGESTS IT BE DELAYED AT LEAST A FEW WEEKS WHEN IT
MIGHT HAVE MORE IMPACT ON THE RHODESIAN AND NAMIBIAN
PROBLEMS; 4) OWEN WELCOMES A GROUP FROM WASHINGTON FOR
DISCUSSIONS NEXT WEEK IN LONDON; THE AGENDA WOULD INCLUDE
A) NATURE AND KEY ISSUES OF NEGOTIATING A CONSTITUTION;
B) ORGANIZATION, TACTICS AND OBJECTIVES OF "JOINT"
BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS WITH LEADERS IN AFRICA; C)
TIMETABLE; D) RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA AS RELATED TO THE
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VICE PRESIDENT'S TRIP. END SUMMARY

1. CHARGE AND AARON (WITH SEITZ) SAW OWEN, GRAHAM,
FERGUSON AND WHYTE (PRESS ADVISER) APRIL 22. AARON
CONVEYED US ADMIRATION FOR OWEN'S SUCCESSFUL AFRICAN
SAFARI TO WHICH FOREIGN SECRETARY REPLIED THAT AMERICAN
SUPPORT HAD BEEN THE VITAL INGREDIENT IN HIS ACCOMPLISH-

MENTS. HE EMPHASIZED THAT THE INITIATIVE IS A "JOINT EXERCISE" AND MUST BE THROUGHOUT THE ENTIRE PROCESS. OWEN SAID HE WANTED TO MAKE THE POINT AT THE OUTSET OF THE DISCUSSION THAT THERE IS NO QUESTION OF HMG TAKING A DIFFERENT DECISION FROM THE US AT ANY STEP ALONG THE WAY. THERE IS NO HURRY, HE SAID, AND NO PRESSURE. HE SAID HE HAD READ THE SECRETARY'S RECENT LETTER AS AN EXPRESSION OF WANTING TO UNDERSTAND CAREFULLY WHAT BOTH GOVERNMENTS ARE HEADED FOR, AND HE FULLY AGREES WITH THIS CONCERN. IT IS A SENTIMENT SHARED BY HIS CABINET COLLEAGUES, OWEN SAID. WE CANNOT AFFORD SECOND THOUGHTS LATER IN THE PROCESS.

2. GRAHAM DESCRIBED THE CURRENT FCO ASSESSMENT OF THE PATRIOTIC FRONT'S POSITION ON A US ROLE IN A CONSTITUTIONAL CONFERENCE. WHILE THE FRONT IS ATTEMPTING TO ESTABLISH PRECONDITIONS, IT IS UNLIKELY THAT NKOMO AT LEAST WOULD REFUSE TO ATTEND A CONFERENCE. MUGABE HAS MORE DIFFICULTIES WITHIN HIS OWN ORGANIZATION. OWEN ADDED THAT THE PATRIOTIC FRONT IS OBLIGED TO MAKE TOUGH PUBLIC STATEMENTS IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN THE MORALE OF THE GUERRILLAS. SMITH HAS THE SAME PROBLEM. "SO I'M RELAXED ABOUT IT," HE SAID, "ALTHOUGH WE MAY RUN INTO THE PROBLEM OF SAVING FACE."

3. OWEN THEN TURNED TO THE QUESTION OF A TIMETABLE LEADING UP TO A CONFERENCE, SAYING OFF-HANDEDLY THAT ONE COULD ARGUE FOR AN EARLY ANNOUNCEMENT OF A CONFERENCE IN ORDER TO PRECLUDE THE VARIOUS PARTIES FROM SETTING UP

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PRECONDITIONS. MOREOVER, IT WOULD BE INCONCEIVABLE THAT ANY ANNOUNCEMENT WOULD AT ANY ONE MOMENT HAVE THE CONCURRENCE OF ALL THE PROSPECTIVE PARTICIPANTS. BUT OTHER THAN KEEPING UP THE SENSE OF MOMENTUM, THE TIMING OF AN ANNOUNCEMENT IS NOT IN ITSELF IMPORTANT. THE ACTUAL CONFERENCE COULD EVEN SLIP TO JULY SO LONG AS MOMENTUM WERE MAINTAINED.

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4. OWEN SUGGESTED THAT THIS THURSDAY, DURING THE HOUSE DEBATE ON RHODESIA SANCTIONS, MIGHT BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SOME SORT OF ANNOUNCEMENT, FOR EXAMPLE THAT WE ARE ENCOURAGED BY THE RESULTS OF OUR MUTUAL DISCUSSIONS, THAT WE WILL BE PURSUING JOINT BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS WITH LEADERS IN AFRICA, AND THAT THESE DISCUSSIONS WILL BE CONDUCTED WITH A VIEW TOWARDS CONVENING A CONFERENCE AT A LATER DATE. ALTERNATIVELY, OWEN WENT ON, WE COULD MAKE NO STATEMENT ON THURSDAY AND WAIT UNTIL MAY, FOLLOWING DISCUSSIONS WITH SECRETARY VANCE, TO ANNOUNCE A CONFERENCE. OWEN SAID HE DID NOT FEEL STRONGLY ABOUT EITHER APPROACH.

5. WHAT WOULD NOT BE ACCEPTABLE, OWEN THEN STRESSED, WOULD BE AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON THURSDAY THAT BRITAIN ALONE WOULD BE UNDERTAKING THESE BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS. HE EXPLAINED THAT AN EXPRESSION OF GENERAL US SUPPORT WOULD BE INSUFFICIENT BECAUSE IT WOULD APPEAR EITHER THAT THE US IS BACKING AWAY FROM THE INITIATIVE OR THAT THE UK IS GIVING INTO DEMANDS BY THE PATRIOTIC FRONT. OWEN HERE DIGRESSED TO SAY THAT THE PATRIOTIC FRONT REMAINS DEEPLY SUSPICIOUS OF US MOTIVES AND HAS NOT YET ABSORBED HOW "FRESH AND RADICAL" THE NEW ADMINISTRATION IS. HE ADDED THAT SMITH STILL FAILED TO APPRECIATE THE NEW
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CIRCUMSTANCES IN WASHINGTON AND THAT OWEN HAD BLUNTLY TOLD SMITH THAT ANY CONCEPT OF A RESTRICTED FRANCHISE WOULD BE "LIKE A RED FLAG TO A BULL" FOR THE AMERICANS.

6. AARON TOLD OWEN THAT WE ARE OPEN TO AN ANNOUNCEMENT ON THURSDAY ABOUT BILATERAL CONSULTATIONS BUT THAT WE WOULD FIRST WANT TO DISCUSS WITH THE BRITISH HOW THESE BILATERALS MIGHT TAKE PLACE. A GROUP WILL COME FROM WASHINGTON NEXT WEEK TO DISCUSS THIS TACTICAL PROBLEM AND ALSO TO EXPLORE SOME OF THE KEY ISSUES THAT MIGHT

EMERGE ONCE NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN ON A CONSTITUTION. OWEN SAID DISCUSSIONS NEXT WEEK HERE WOULD BE EXTREMELY USEFUL, ADDING THAT HE WELCOMED THE GROUP AND COULD POSSIBLY MEET WITH THEM THURSDAY AFTER WORKING LEVEL SESSIONS WEDNESDAY. AARON SAID WE ARE ANXIOUS TO DISCUSS PROBLEMS OF PROCEDURE AND SUBSTANCE. WE DO NOT IMMEDIATELY WANT TO PRECIPITATE A CONFRONTATION WITH THE NATIONALISTS AND WISH TO AVOID ANY STRAINS THAT MAY DEVELOP LATER. OUR SUPPORT FOR THE CURRENT INITIATIVE, HOWEVER, REMAINS COMPLETE.

7. AARON EXPRESSED APPRECIATION FOR OWEN'S EFFORTS TO DISPEL ANY IDEAS IN AFRICA THAT THE US MIGHT BE WILLING TO USE TROOPS TO ENFORCE AN AGREEMENT. OWEN SAID THE AMERICAN POSITION ON THE USE OF TROOPS WAS ANALOGOUS TO HMG'S OWN STANCE. HE POINTED OUT, HOWEVER, THAT HE HAD LEFT HIMSELF SOME ROOM DURING THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATE LAST TUESDAY WHEN HE AFFIRMED THAT BRITISH TROOPS WOULD NOT BE COMMITTED "IN ANY MAJOR WAY". BRITAIN MAY HAVE TO DISPATCH INDIVIDUAL OFFICERS, HE EXPLAINED. "YOU CAN'T GET A SETTLEMENT WITH A LOW PROFILE." OWEN MENTIONED THERE MIGHT BE A ROLE FOR US LOGISTICAL SUPPORT DURING A TRANSITION PERIOD. AARON SAID THE POINT WAS WORTH DISCUSSING BUT THAT PUBLIC SPECULATION WOULD BE HARMFUL.

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8. AARON THEN DESCRIBED THE BACKGROUND LEADING TO CONSIDERATION OF A VICE PRESIDENTIAL TRIP TO AFRICA. HE

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SAID NO DECISION HAD BEEN TAKEN, AND THAT ANY MEETING WITH VORSTER WOULD HAVE TO BE ASSURED OF POSITIVE RESULTS. A MEETING WITH THE SOUTH AFRICANS WOULD BE DESIGNED TO SUPPORT CURRENT EFFORTS ON RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA AS WELL AS TO CONVEY THE US STANCE THAT THERE MUST BE A PROGRESSIVE SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY. OWEN SAID HE FAVORED A TRIP BY THE VICE PRESIDENT. HE DID NOT COMMENT ON THE ISSUE OF SOUTH AFRICAN SOCIETY OTHER THAN SAYING THAT HE HAD DUCKED THE TOPIC WHILE IN CAPE TOWN AND THAT VORSTER WOULD NOT DISCUSS THE PREMISE ON WHICH APARTHEID IS FOUNDED. HE ADVISED A TRIP NOT TAKE PLACE NOW BUT LATER WHEN PROBLEM ON RHODESIA AND NAMIBIA ARE BETTER DEFINED. MID-MAY MIGHT BE A GOOD DATE TO TALK TO VORSTER ON NAMIBIA ("YOU WON'T BUDGE HIM IF HE HAS TO ABANDON TURNHALLE; HE'S DAMN NEAR GRANITE ON THIS ISSUE"). OWEN ALSO SUGGESTED THERE COULD BE A VICE PRESIDENTIAL STATEMENT AT SOME POINT ON RHODESIA WHICH MIGHT BRING SMITH TO HIS SENSES ON, FOR EXAMPLE, THE FRANCHISE ISSUE. THE VICE PRESIDENT MIGHT ALSO BE IN A POSITION TO DISPEL NATIONALIST SUSPICIONS OF US MOTIVES BY SPEAKING DIRECTLY WITH THEM WHILE AVOIDING GETTING BOGGED DOWN IN THE NEGOTIATING PROCESS. WHILE RECOGNIZING THAT THE VICE PRESIDENT'S TRIP WOULD BE A "SEPARATE TRACK", OWEN SAID THE TIMING OF ALL THESE RELATED EVENTS SHOULD BE CLOSELY SECRET

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COORDINATED BETWEEN THE US AND UK. PERHAPS THE STATE DEPARTMENT GROUP HERE NEXT WEEK COULD ALSO DISCUSS SCHEDULES AND NAMIBIAN ISSUES.

9. OWEN CLOSED BY SAYING THAT HE WOULD BE PREPARED TO FLY TO WASHINGTON ANYTIME IT WAS BELIEVED NECESSARY AND THAT HE LOOKED FORWARD TO HIS FORTHCOMING DISCUSSIONS WITH SECRETARY VANCE. THEN, WITH A SMILE OF CONFIDENCE, HE ADDED, "BEFORE I WENT TO AFRICA, I THOUGHT WE COULD GET A CONFERENCE; NOW I THINK WE CAN GET A SETTLEMENT."

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